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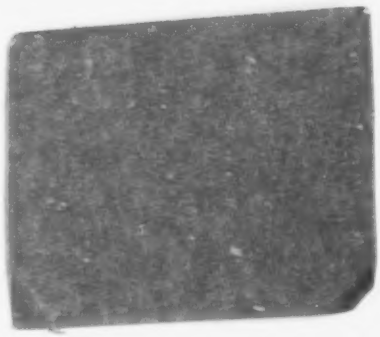

VOLUME OF DOCUMENTATION

Note by the secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Mandate

1. In its Report on Conference Servicing of the Conference of the Parties and its Subsidiary Bodies, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) raised the question of the volume of documentation and recommended that, in line with economy measures being taken in the United Nations Secretariat, the Conference of the Parties (COP) should be requested to review the number of documents it produces and the manner in which they are to be produced (A/50/7/Add.15, para. 7).[1] The COP addressed this question, at its second session, in July 1996, and endorsed the ACABQ's recommendation to limit, to the extent possible, the number and length of the documents produced by the secretariat (decision 17/CP.2, para.2).

2. At its fifth session, held from 25 to 28 February 1997, the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) recalled decision 17/CP.2 and noted that the Executive Secretary required more time to prepare recommendations on this matter and would submit them to the SBI at its sixth session (FCCC/SBI/1997/6). The SBI also requested the Executive Secretary to explore with the United Nations office at Geneva (UNOG), the possibility that, when justified by exceptional circumstances, certain documents may be distributed in each language, as they become available.

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[1] ACABQ Report on Conference Servicing of the Conference of the Parties and its Subsidiary Bodies, 12 April 1996.

B. Background

3. An excess volume of documentation is a relative concept, and a new and growing work programme can be expected to increase the number of documents it produces, if it is to carry out its mandate in the most efficient manner. Simply limiting the absolute volume of documentation may not be appropriate at the present phase of the Convention process.

4. Nonetheless, there are areas where positive changes can be made. First, problems in document preparation arise from limitations on the capacity of the secretariat to prepare and ensure the quality of documents, and to provide the infrastructure for processing documents, such as, editing, formatting and advance distribution. Second, there is a problem for delegations to absorb the documents that they request. Typically, the first problem shows up in lateness of documents, which aggravates the second.

5. Strains on these pressure points could be reduced by less demand for documents by Convention bodies and more concise documents produced by the secretariat. Additional relief could also be obtained if the Convention bodies spread out their demands over a wider time-frame.

6. Two further constraints are to be found in the handling of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) documentation by UNOG - limited translation capacity, and the policy of releasing documents only when the six language versions are available.

7. The translation bottle-neck could be loosened by producing technical materials, such as tabular annexes and technical reports, in the original language only. Regarding simultaneous language distribution, the secretariat has been reminded by UNOG that the provision of conference services to Convention bodies is subject to the rules of the General Assembly (A/C.5/50/58, para. 10)[2], in which the flexibility envisaged in the SBI's request to the Executive Secretary is not foreseen.

C. Possible action by the SBI

8. The SBI may wish to take note of the action being taken by the secretariat and give guidance thereon. It may also consider the proposals below for action by the Parties, in particular the procedure suggested in paragraph 12, and recommend action by the COP.

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[2] Report of the Secretary-General on the Programme Budget for the Biennium 1996-1997.

II. PROPOSALS

A. Proposed action by the secretariat

9 The secretariat is pursuing the following measures regarding documentation. It aims:

(a) To establish volume targets for documents through its internal planning process;

(b) To revise editorial guidelines to ensure clear and concise documents, backed up by training for staff in their use;

(c) To separate presentation of tabular and technical material, without translation;

(d) To establish a series of technical reports, which would supplement the official documentation prepared in response to the agendas of Convention bodies. These reports would not receive general distribution, but be made available to national focal points and, on request, to other users in the original language only. Technical reports that merited a wider dissemination could be translated as publications of the secretariat, if funds were available;

(e) To disseminate documents efficiently, both on paper and electronically, including informal distribution of the original text in advance of the official distribution by UNOG.

10 Improvements in the documentation process are a priority in the secretariat's management agenda. Ideas to this end are generated, and their implementation is kept under review by a task force on documentation, led by the Intergovernmental and Information Support (IIS) programme.

B. Proposed action by the Parties

11 The secretariat proposes that its actions in this area be complemented by action by Parties:

(a) To limit the volume of their submissions for circulation to Convention bodies, even though these are not translated;

(b) To focus the content of submissions on material pertinent to the forthcoming sessions of the subsidiary bodies and avoid reproduction of previously presented statements;

(c) To limit their requests for numbers of hard copies of documents;

(d) To limit requests by Convention bodies for documents that need to be translated; and

(e) To schedule the delivery of documents over time in a manner that corresponds to the capacity of the Convention bodies to consider them.

12. In order to keep points (d) and (e), referred to above, to the fore, it is proposed that a procedure could be instituted in the work of the COP and its subsidiary bodies, whereby before the adoption of the conclusions of each session, the presiding officer would consult the Executive Secretary regarding the feasibility of producing the documentation within the time-frame envisaged in those conclusions. Should any problems of timely delivery be foreseen, the presiding officer would propose to the Convention body that it adjust its demand for documentation in consequence, by reducing the demand, or allowing more time for delivery.

13. The SBI is invited to consider the above proposals and to recommend their adoption by the COP.

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